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STUDY SAYS SOVIET CUTS MISSILE GAP

At Present Rate, Russians Will Have Big Lead by '71, House Panel Told

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WASHINGTON, July 11—A study sponsored by the House Armed Services Committee has concluded that the Soviet Union will achieve a marked nuclear superiority over the United States by 1971 unless steps are taken this year to improve American strategic nuclear capabilities.

The 103-page study, released by the committee today, was conducted by the American Security Council, a private research organization, at the request of the committee chairman, Representative L. Mendel Rivers, Democrat of South Carolina.

The council has among its members a number of retired senior military officers, including Generals Curtis E. Lemay and Thomas A. Power, former Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force, and Dr. Edward Teller, the principal developer of the hydrogen bomb.

Schriever Led Panel

Gen. Bernard A. Schriever, retired chief of the Air Force Systems Command, headed a special subcommittee of the council that supervised the study.

The study argued that if the Soviet Union continued with its current strategic nuclear development, and the United States did not alter its own strategic planning, "a massive megatonnage gap will have developed" by 1971.

By that time, the study asserted, the Soviet Union will have a nuclear delivery capability of at least 30,000 megatons, and possibly 50,000 megatons, while the United States delivery capability in 1971 will range

megatons. A megaton is the equivalent of a million tons of TNT.

Delivery capability refers to the amount of megatonnage the available bombers and missiles are able to hurl against an enemy nation.

"The preponderance of the evidence points to the conclusion that the Soviet Union is succeeding in its massive drive toward strategic military superiority and that the United States is cooperating in this effort by slowing down its side of the arms race," the study asserted.

In a statement, the Defense Department did not directly contradict the study's findings, but argued that deliverable megatonnage was not an accurate indicator of "true military capability."

"It is most important to be clear that numbers of weapons and size of warheads alone are a very incomplete indicator of military strength," the Pentagon statement said.

'True' Capability Defined

"True military capability results from numbers of weapons that are accurate and reliable, that can survive an enemy attack and that can penetrate enemy defenses," it said.

"The United States has and will continue to have more than enough of such weapons to convince any enemy that an attack on this country would be suicidal."

The statement emphasized that American nuclear strategy consisted of attempting to deter nuclear war by maintaining sufficient capability to inflict prohibitive damage on an enemy in a retaliatory strike, despite whatever damage an enemy managed to cause in the United States by a first, offensive nuclear attack.

"The present American strategic forces are capable of doing this," the statement argued. "The improvements we are planning will insure that we retain this capability indefinitely."

Multiple Warhead Stressed

In Congressional testimony in January, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara contended that the United States had a three-to-one superiority over the Soviet Union in intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched Polaris types and a four-to-one lead in intercontinental bombers.

Since then, Defense Department officials have declined to give such ratios but have argued that the United States has a superiority over the Soviet Union of five or six to one in the number of warheads American strategic weapons could launch.